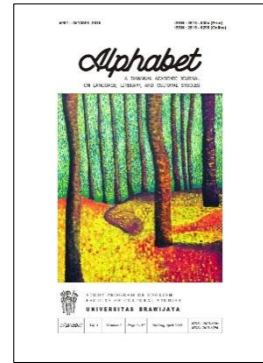


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## Critical Thinking Questions in the Reading Section of EFL Textbooks

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# Critical Thinking Questions in the Reading Section of EFL Textbooks

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## Abstract

In this article, we discuss how far EFL textbooks used as teaching materials for second grade students in senior high schools in Poso regency, Central Sulawesi province, accommodate critical thinking skill in the textbook's reading comprehension section. The assumption underlying this discussion is that an ideal EFL textbook is supposed to meet the needs to accommodate critical thinking skill as one of the required skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In doing so, Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and four levels of comprehension were used to examine the questions level and which level of reading comprehension each question falls into. The sources of data were two commercially published and one government-published EFL textbooks. The discussion in this paper leads to which EFL textbook accommodates critical thinking skill in the form of WH questions in its reading comprehension section.

## Keywords:

question level, comprehension level, critical thinking, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning

Improving students' critical thinking is an essential aspect of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. In the context of Indonesia, critical thinking has been accommodated in the 2013 curriculum as the current curriculum of Indonesia. Because the challenge for education in Indonesia today is to equip students with the skills required for competing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (Hendarman, 2016; Nizam & Santoso, 2013), it is important to pay more attention on how critical thinking as one of the required skills has been integrated in the EFL textbooks written based on the 2013 curriculum.

Teaching materials as a key component in curriculum must be designed to meet the goals of curriculum. Both printed and non-printed teaching materials are intended to be used in instructional activity. Therefore, teaching materials in the form of textbook should be in line with the recent implemented curriculum. Wote,

Senduk, and Rettob (2014) focused their research on the types of questions in EFL textbook for senior high school students and found that the most dominant type of questions was *knowledge type* based on *Bloom's Taxonomy*. Other research conducted by Muchlis in 2015 also showed that the question that mostly appeared in one of the EFL textbook, published by Erlangga in 2013 and used for senior vocational school students, were of *knowledge* and *comprehension* levels. These results are supported by earlier research done by Hayati, Syahrudin, and Fitrawati in 2012. They explained that the questions in *English Zone Book* grade X, XI, and XII were dominantly *knowledge* and *comprehension*. The results of these three studies imply that the EFL textbooks in Indonesia are not well-designed to meet the needs of education in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Previous studies have shown that the level of most questions found in English language

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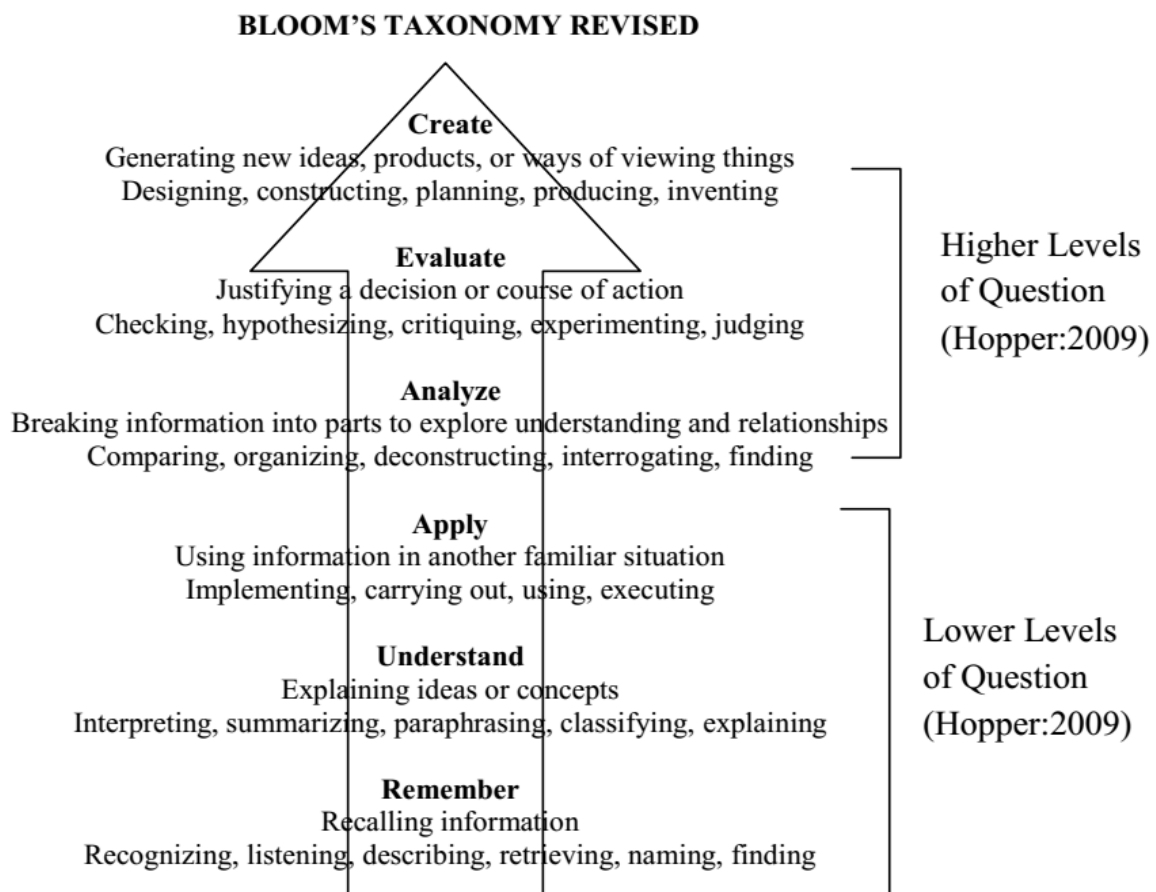
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textbooks prescribed for the Indonesian senior high school's students is *knowledge* or *remember* level (Muchlis, 2015; Wote et al., 2013; Hayati, 2012). However, as far as this discussion is concerned, little information has been provided on which textbook is designed to meet the goal of education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework. The research, therefore, proposes to examine whether three EFL textbooks written based on the 2013 curriculum for the second graders of senior high school in Indonesia, published respectively by Yudhistira, Erlangga and Kemendikbud, meet one of the purposes of 2013 curriculum, which is to promote the students' critical thinking. To investigate if the questions designed in these three textbooks are

supposed to encourage students think critically when they use the textbooks to learn English, we used *Revised Bloom's Taxonomy* combined with the levels of reading comprehension as the framework for analysis.

### QUESTIONS IN TEXTBOOK

Textbook is important in the implementation of a curriculum because it guides teachers and students in instructional activities to achieve the objectives (Ratnasari & Pusparini, 2014; Richards, 2001). However, Nation and Macalister (2010, p.159) highlight the importance of choosing a textbook that allows for flexibility instead of choosing a



**Figure 1.** Levels of question based on Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. Adapted from *Practicing College Learning Strategies* (pp. 43-44) by Carolyn H. Hopper (2010), Wadsworth: Cengage Learning; "Bloom's Thinking & Learning", by Cathy Costello Our Virtual Library. Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License.

**Table 1.** The Relationship of Levels of Reading Comprehension and Levels of Question

Levels of Question	Levels of Reading Comprehension			
	Literal Reciting facts and under- standing word meaning	Inferential Supplying meaning	Critical Giving per- sonal reac- tion	Creative Creating or designing new infor- mation
<b>Remember</b> Recalling, recognizing, listen- ing, describing, retrieving, naming, finding	√			
<b>Understand</b> Explaining, interpreting, sum- marizing, paraphrasing, classi- fying	√	√		
<b>Apply</b> Using information in another similar situation, implement- ing, carrying out, using, exe- cuting		√		
<b>Analyse</b> Breaking information into parts, comparing, organizing, deconstructing, interrogating, finding			√	
<b>Evaluate</b> Justifying, checking, hypothe- sizing, critiquing, experiment- ing, judging			√	
<b>Create</b> Generating new ideas, design- ing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing				√

*Note.* Adapted from Levels of Reading Comprehension (Westwood, 2001; Smith, 1969), and Bloom's taxonomy revised (Anderson, 2003; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2002; Bloom, 1956)

**Table 2.** Questions in *TA* textbook

No	Page	Question	Location of Answer
1	33	<u>What make those Invitation letters formal?</u> Identify the formal expressions	Writing note, p. 33.
2	33	<u>Which language</u> features distinguish formal from informal? Give examples	Writing note, p. 33
3	33	<u>What is the purpose</u> of writing a formal invitation letter?	Learning objective, p. 27
4	33	<u>What is RSVP?</u>	Writing note, p. 33.

textbook that is meant to strictly meet the needs of a certain curriculum. Their argument provides the basis for the schools to choose which textbook that they will use as compulsory teaching materials for their teachers. However, it implies a consequence; if the school fails to decide which textbook is flexible for teaching materials or else to be used to meet the educational needs of the global world, then, the students will suffer. Their competencies are not sufficient and appropriate for facing the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning demand.

EFL textbook serves different purposes for teachers. It can act as a basis for language practice, a source of supplemental material, as an inspiration for classroom activities, and as a support for less experienced or novice teachers (Frehat & Smadi, 2014; Ratnasari & Pusparini, 2014; Garinger, 2002; Richard, 2001). In addition, EFL textbooks can provide information of how these textbooks are designed to accommodate the skills needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

Questioning is one of the most regularly employed teaching strategies. This strategy can be used to encourage critical thinking skill, which is so much required by the students (Frehat & Smadi, 2014; Westwood, 2001; Smith, 1969). In general, questions belong to two major categories: lower-level questions and higher-level questions (Krathwol, 2002; Bloom, 1956). Lower-level questions emphasize the recall of facts and universal methods, processes, structures, and settings, while higher-level questions are more advanced, re-

quire knowledge of subject matter, and demand the students to engage in deeper thinking processes.

Ideally, a well-designed EFL textbook contains questions of various levels to meet the goal of education stated in the curriculum or in the official statement of learning needs. The framework of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning has already provided the standard for key educational goals; therefore, EFL textbooks used as teaching materials must contain questions that can promote the required skills.

### LEVELS OF QUESTIONS AND LEVELS OF READING COMPREHENSION

As the framework for analysis, we used Bloom's Taxonomy revised by Anderson and Krathwol in 2002 that is presented in Figure 1.

We also combined *Revised Bloom's Taxonomy* with four levels of reading comprehension (Westwood, 2001; Smith, 1969) to complete the framework. The first level, *literal reading comprehension*, is the basic level where in this level the readers are led to understand about facts found in the text. In answering the question of this level, the readers read the text at glance because the answers are usually stated directly in the text. To be able to read the text in this level of comprehension, the reader must understand word meaning of the text. The second level is *inferential reading comprehension* where a reader needs to go beyond what has been written in the passage and needs to add meaning or draw conclusions. The reader has to be able to com-

bine between their experience and prior knowledge with any information existed in the passage, to predict what may happened, to work out cause and effect, or to discover relationship between people and things.

conducted preliminary interviews at three schools located in Poso Kota, Poso Kota Utara, and Poso Kota Selatan sub-regencies to obtain information related to which EFL textbooks were used as teaching materials in those

**Table 3.** Data tabulation for *PtE* textbook

Level of Questions	Level of Reading Comprehension			
	Literal	Inferential	Critical	Creative
Remember	48 questions	-	-	-
Understand	1 question	11 questions	-	-
Apply	-	-	-	-
Analyse	-	-	-	-
Evaluate	-	-	-	-
Create	-	-	-	-

The third comprehension level is *critical reading comprehension*, which requires reader to have high abilities in analysing the passage such as judging the information in the passage that requires the interpretation and evaluation of the readers themselves. The last level is *creative reading comprehension*, which is the highest level in reading comprehension where a reader is expected to take information or ideas in the passage and then develop new ideas or original thinking from them.

Lower level questions, as seen on Table 1, are to accommodate the students' thinking process to achieve literal and inferential comprehension levels in learning English, while higher level questions are to encourage more complex thinking process as required to achieve critical and creative comprehension levels. To make it clear, Table 1 displays the relationship of *Levels of Reading Comprehension* and *Levels of Question* used as framework of analysis for this research.

**METHOD**

This research was qualitative in nature. *Revised Bloom's Taxonomy* and *Levels of Reading Comprehension* were used as a tool for data analysis. Before determining the sources of data, we

schools. Based on the interviews, we focused, as the sources of data, on three EFL textbooks for second grade of senior high school in Indonesia. Two textbooks were commercially published; one was *Talk Active* (hereafter *TA*) published by Yudhistira in 2014 and the other was *Pathway to English* (hereafter *PtE*) published by Erlangga in 2014. Another book was *Stop Bullying Now* (hereafter *SBN*) published by Kemendikbud in 2014. The inquiries were targeted to examine WH questions found in the reading section of Chapter I to Chapter V of each book, which are the learning materials for Semester 1. In analysing the data, we followed three steps of data analysis, i.e. data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were reduced using *Revised Bloom's Taxonomy* and *Levels of Reading Comprehension* as the framework for data analysis, and displayed as part of discussions. Later, the conclusion is drawn from the discussions.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**TA Textbook**

Only four WH questions were found in this textbook. Using the framework of analysis used

in this research, all questions appeared to be categorized into in *Remember* level. Table 2 displays the data and the location of answers provided in the text.

As seen on Table 2, the answers to all four questions can be easily identified in the reading text. Hence, the questions function to recall information previously provided, and they do not require the readers to think of or give an opinion on something (Anderson, 2003; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2002; Bloom, 1956). Therefore, the WH questions found in *TA* textbook are categorized into *Remember* level and *Literal comprehension* level of questions, which are not appropriate for promoting critical thinking for the senior high school students.

*regards to Mentari's parents?"* is categorized into *Understand* level of question and falls into the *Literal* comprehension level since this question asks the students to explain the reason of a character's action yet the answer can still be directly found in the text.

The rest 11 questions are considered to be in *Understand* level of question because the answers must be based on the understanding of facts already explained in the text. However, as the students must be able to combine what they have known from their prior knowledge and what new information they find in the text, these questions fall into the category of *Inferential* comprehension level. For example, two related questions are found in Chapter IV pages

**Table 4.** Data tabulation for *SBN* textbook

Level of Questions	Level of Reading Comprehension			
	Literal	Inferential	Critical	Creative
Remember	2 questions	-	-	-
Understand		5 questions	-	-
Apply	-	-	-	-
Analyse	-	5 questions	-	-
Evaluate	-	-	7 questions	-
Create	-	-	-	10 questions

### ***PtE* Textbook**

This book included 60 questions. Table 3 displays the tabulation for *PtE* textbook (see the data in Appendix 1).

Of the 60 questions found in *PtE* textbook, 48 questions are categorized into *Remember* level of question since the students can easily locate the answers to the questions in the text. The questions are, for example, "*What should the people of Jakarta do to avoid gutters and drainages becoming clogged?*" or "*Why did the former governor build the elevated road to Sukarno-Hatta international airport?*". Since the questions are cited directly in the text, these 48 questions fall into the *Literal Comprehension* level. Furthermore, one question found in Chapter 3, p. 45, "*Why does Bulan send*

40 and 59, "*What do you think Josie Burton should do if she can't come?*" and "*What is RSVP?*". The answers to these questions are not stated directly in the text, yet the clues to those answers are provided in the 23<sup>rd</sup> line in the text.

Judging from the levels of questions in *PtE* textbook, we concluded that this textbook is also not appropriate to be used to encourage critical thinking in teaching English for senior high school students. This judgement is based on the facts that the answers to those questions are either directly stated in the text or can be inferred from the text. This means that the levels of 60 questions found in this textbook are either *Remember* or *Understand* questions, which are from the *Literal* or *Inferential Comprehension* Levels.

**SBN Textbook**

There are 29 WH questions in the reading sections of Kemendikbud’s textbook, which are displayed on Table 4 (see the data in Appendix 1).

This government-published textbook has 29 WH questions found in the reading sections in Chapter 1 to Chapter 5, and the levels, according to the analysis, vary from Remember level to Create level, and the questions fall into Literal comprehension level to Creative com-

prehension level. reaction by citing examples from the text or linking their experience and the new information they read in the text. Therefore, these questions fall into the category of Critical comprehension level.

The rest 10 WH questions are included in *Create* level of question. To answer this kind of questions, the students must be able to compile new information from the texts through generating, planning, or producing (Anderson, 2003; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2002; Bloom, 1956).

**Table 5.** Questions in *TA*, *PtE* and *SBN*

No	Textbook	Lower Levels	%	Higher Levels	%	Total
1	<i>TA</i>	4	100 %	-	-	4
2	<i>PtE</i>	60	100 %	-	-	60
3	<i>SBN</i>	7	24 %	22	76%	29

prehension level. However, no question of *Apply* level of question is found in the textbook.

Five questions are categorized into *Analyse* level of question because the questions require the students to find coherence in the text in order to answer the questions. To answer “*In the beginning of the play, Madame Loisel was very sad and unsatisfied. Why was she sad and unsatisfied? What did she want?*” (Kemendikbud, 2013, p.75), for example, the students are expected to analyse the coherence of the text to find out the reasons of Madame Loisel’s sadness and unsatisfactory feeling by considering her expectation. Paying attention to the narration of the text narrator can assist the students in finding the answers.

Another 7 questions are categorized into *Evaluate* question because the students are required to give and present their personal response or opinion about information in the texts. Some of the questions are “*According to President Soekarno, peace is very important. What do you think?*” and “*What were your thoughts about the ending?*” Since these questions require students’ personal response, the closed answers are not needed. Instead, this kind of questions requires the students to be able to give their personal

The questions are, among others, “*If you had a chance to rewrite the story, how would the story end?*” and “*If you were a chance to give a speech in front of all the president and prime ministers of the world, what would you talk about?*” Such kind of questions requires the students to create new idea after they read the text. *Create* question is the highest level of question based on Bloom’s Taxonomy and therefore the questions that are categorized into this level of question also fall into the category of *Creative comprehension* level, which is the highest level of reading comprehension. *Creative comprehension* level itself is the highest level in reading comprehension since it does not only require the readers to analyse the reading but also create new ideas or thoughts after obtaining new information from the text.

After analysing this textbook, the researchers concluded that this government-published textbook can be used to encourage and promote critical thinking for senior high school students. 58 % of 29 questions found in this textbook is either critical or creative level, thus it falls into the category of critical and creative comprehension levels.

Table 5 shows the percentage of lower level questions and higher level questions in the EFL



textbooks used in senior high schools for second grade in Poso regency. Since no higher level questions found in *TA* and *PtE* textbooks, the researchers concluded that these commercially published textbooks are not appropriate to be used as teaching materials if the teaching goal is to promote critical thinking of the students. It can be concluded that the reading section in the two commercially published EFL textbooks emphasize more on the lower-level thinking questions. This shows that there is a tendency that these textbooks are designed to help students who still need to learn about factual knowledge presented in English instead of those who need to practice their critical thinking in comprehending information presented in English. However, these textbooks can still be used as supplementary materials or be used at the end of the junior high school stage, which is a more appropriate level to teach how to answer lower level questions in English.

*SBN* textbook has the highest percentage of higher level questions, which means that this textbook is appropriate to be used as compulsory materials for students, especially if the goal of classroom practice is to meet the goal of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. This implies that the textbooks published by Kemendikbud are designed to prepare the students with critical thinking skills required to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### CONCLUSION

As a part of curriculum facilitates both teacher and students to achieve the goal of education, textbooks must become the point of consideration for teachers. The higher is the level of the questions presented in the EFL textbooks, the better the students are in practicing critical thinking in obtaining information presented in English and it will help promote their critical thinking skill. Therefore, in choosing the appropriate textbook used as compulsory teaching materials, the school must pay attention to the aspects being taught and emphasized in the textbook itself. One of the most recommended ways to evaluate the content of

a textbook is to pay attention to the types of questions found in the textbook. This seems to be an extra effort to do by the school; however this is worth pursuing as a way to face the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. This research showed that government-published EFL textbook is the most ready-to-use textbook than the other two EFL textbooks as teaching materials. Therefore, this textbook is better to be used to teach English for second grade of senior high school students in Indonesia.

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**Appendix 1:**  
**Data from the *PtE* and *SBN* Textbooks**

Level	<i>PtE</i>	<i>SBN</i>
<b>Remember / Literal Com- prehension</b>	CH1	
	1. <u>What should the people of Jakarta do</u> to avoid gutters and drainages becoming clogged?	1. What <u>happened at the end</u> of the story?
	2. <u>How many</u> canals were built by the former governor?	2. What is the <u>new kind</u> of colonialism that president Sukarno is talking about?
	3. <u>Why did</u> the former governor build the elevated road to Sukarno-Hatta international airport?	
	4. <u>Where</u> can we see garbage piled up in Jakarta?	
	5. What is <u>the purpose</u> of the writer sending this letter to the Jakarta Post?	
	CH2	
	6. What is the <u>purpose</u> of the writer sending writing this text?	
	7. <u>What makes</u> Indonesia one of the most corrupted countries?	
	8. What are <u>the writer's opinions</u> to overcome corruption in Indonesia?	
	9. What is the <u>topic</u> of the discussion?	
	10. <u>Why does</u> Angie say the education system in fantasia island is terrible?	
	11. <u>Why does</u> Angie say the education system in fantasia island is terrible?	
	12. <u>Who supports</u> Angie's opinion?	
	13. <u>Why does</u> Ryan agree with Angie's opinion?	
	14. Does Suzan add a new aspect? What is that?	
	15. Who doesn't agree with Angie's opinion?	
	CH3	
	16. What does the <u>speaker hope</u> ?	
	17. <u>Who are</u> the speakers?	
	18. <u>What are</u> they talking about?	
	19. What does <u>Hendi hope</u> from dora's plan to be on diet?	
	20. What is <u>their hope</u> for the pizza restaurant on the corner?	
	21. What are they <u>talking about</u> ?	
	22. <u>Who is</u> Bulan?	
	23. <u>Why does</u> Bulan plan a peace declaration?	
	24. What is the text about?	
	25. <u>Why did</u> Vivakananda write a letter to Harry?	
	26. <u>Why did</u> the writer feel fortunate?	
27. <u>What did</u> the writer send together with her letter?		
28. What did the writer <u>mean</u> by writing 'my good wishes through this letter' in the letter?		
29. What is <u>the email</u> about?		

	<p>30. What is the <u>purpose</u> of writing the letter?</p> <p>31. <u>Why did</u> Anya thank to Salma?</p> <p>32. The writer wrote 'take heart and may God bless you. Wishing you a very speedy recovery.' What does it <u>mean</u>?</p>	
	<p>CH4</p> <p>33. What is <u>letter</u> about?</p> <p>34. <u>Who invited</u> Mrs. Josie Burton?</p> <p>35. <u>Who is</u> Mrs. Josie Burton?</p> <p>36. <u>Why should</u> the invitation be formal?</p> <p>37. <u>What event</u> will be held in VCA school of drama?</p> <p>38. Who should the RSVP be <u>addressed</u> to?</p>	
	<p>CH5</p> <p>39. What is the <u>e-mail</u> about?</p> <p>40. <u>Why did</u> Samy write 'I miss you' in his e-mail?</p> <p>41. <u>How did</u> Samy salute his father?</p> <p>42. <u>How did</u> Samy close his e-mail?</p> <p>43. <u>Who sent</u> the letter?</p> <p>44. <u>Who received</u> the letter?</p> <p>45. <u>When</u> was the letter written?</p> <p>46. <u>What type</u> of personal letters does Dona's letter belong to?</p> <p>47. What is <u>the purpose</u> of writing the letter?</p> <p>48. <u>Why did</u> Dona thank to Melodi?</p>	
Understand / Literal Comprehension	<p>CH6</p> <p>49. <u>Why does</u> Bulan send regards to mentari's parents?</p>	
Understand / Inferential Comprehension	<p>50. What is the <u>text</u> telling us about?</p> <p>51. What is <u>the main idea</u> of the paragraph?</p> <p>52. Who is <u>the speaker</u>?</p> <p>53. Who is <u>Adi</u>?</p> <p>54. What is <u>the topic</u> of the monologue?</p> <p>55. <u>Why does</u> the speaker express a wish?</p> <p>56. What do you <u>think</u> Josie Burton should do if she can't come?</p> <p>57. What is <u>RSVP</u>?</p> <p>58. What is <u>the main idea</u> of the text?</p> <p>59. <u>What made</u> dona write the letter?</p> <p>60. What can you <u>learn</u> from Dona's letter?</p>	<p>3. The story doesn't reveal how the prince was turned into a fish. What do you think might have <u>happened</u>?</p> <p>4. Why did the fisherman's wife keep asking her husband to go back to the fish?</p> <p>5. What <u>lesson</u> did you learn from the story</p> <p>6. <u>What event</u> brought about the beginning of a new life for monsieur and Madame Loisel?</p> <p>7. What is <u>the moral</u> of the story?</p>
Analyse / Inferential Comprehension		<p>8. <u>How did</u> he feel about it?</p> <p>9. <u>Why did</u> president Sukarno want everyone to be united?</p> <p>10. In the beginning of the play, Madame Loisel was very sad and unsatisfied. <u>Why was she sad</u> and unsatisfied? What did she want?</p> <p>11. <u>Why</u> do you think Madame Loisel borrowed the necklace from her friend?</p>

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	12. <u>Why</u> do you think they didn't tell Madame Forestier that they had lost the necklace?
<b>Evaluate / Critical Com- prehension</b>	13. What do you <u>think</u> of fisherman's wife? 14. Do you <u>think</u> it is necessary to educate people on issue of bullying? Why? 15. Are you aware of cyber bullying? Do you <u>think</u> it is worse than physical bullying? Why? 16. According to president Sukarno peace is very important, what do you <u>think</u> ? 17. What do you <u>think</u> of Madame Loisel? 18. What do you <u>think</u> of Rancho? 19. What were your <u>thoughts</u> about ending?
<b>Create / Crea- tive Compre- hension</b>	20. If you had a chance to <u>rewrite</u> the story, how would the story end? 21. What can young people like you <u>do</u> to prevent or stop bullying? 22. What are your hopes and <u>dreams</u> for the world and especially for your country? 23. Do you think president Sukarno was able to realize his dreams and hopes? If yes, <u>How</u> ? 24. If you were a chance to give a speech in front of all the president and prime ministers of the world, what would you <u>talk</u> about? 25. What kind of <u>ending</u> did you expect? 26. If you had a chance to <u>rewrite</u> the story, how would the story end? 27. Do you <u>think</u> it is important to have faith? Why? 28. We always pray to God asking for his help. Describe a time when you asked God for something but he answered your prayer in a way you had not anticipated. How did you <u>feel</u> ? 29. If you had a chance to <u>rewrite</u> the story, how would the story end?

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